

THE BYZANTINE CONTRIBUTION TO WESTERN ART OF THE TWELFTH AND THIRTEENTH CENTURIES

Report on the Dumbarton Oaks Symposium of 1965

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FROM April 29 to May 1, 1965, a Symposium was held at Dumbarton Oaks under the joint direction of Professor Kurt Weitzmann and the present writer on the subject of the Byzantine contribution to the art of the Latin West in the two centuries A.D. 1100 to 1300. Given the complexity of the topic and the large number of open questions involved, it was realized from the outset that an even and systematic coverage would not be possible. The approach was selective and the exploratory character of the proceedings was underlined by the division of the material primarily according to artistic media, rather than according to countries or chronological phases. The participants were asked to define the Byzantine element within technically homogeneous groups of monuments, though most of these groups also were associated with specific regions and periods. Only pictorial media were discussed, to the exclusion of architecture. Broader syntheses were attempted in the opening and concluding lectures.

In his introductory paper, which is published as the first article in the present volume, Professor Weitzmann placed the problem of the artistic relations between East and West during the period under discussion in the perspective of the earlier history of Byzantine influences on the art of the Latin West, beginning with the sixth century. He showed how in the time of the Crusades this influence assumed, on the one hand, a new intensity, affecting as it did much of European art in broad waves, though, on the other hand, it became more one-sided than it had been heretofore, the chief attraction of Byzantine art to Westerners of this period being its formal and stylistic qualities.

The first medium to be discussed individually was mosaic. In a paper entitled "Byzantine

Mosaicists in Italy: Their Background and Their Impact," the present writer examined the origins and the role of the "colonies" of Byzantine artists established on Italian soil as a result of the efforts of a number of patrons to reintroduce the mosaic medium for wall decoration. While the influence of these workshops has at times been overrated, they did play the role of fountainheads through which Byzantine art became accessible to Westerners, and, in some instances, also that of meeting grounds where Eastern and Western traditions and attitudes reacted upon one another.

In a far-ranging enquiry, Professor Otto Demus examined the sources, the scope, the phases, and also the limitations of Byzantine influences in Romanesque mural painting, drawing on examples from Italy, the Alpine region, France, England, and Spain. Thanks to the hospitality of the National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, this lecture was held at the Museum of Natural History, and was followed by a visit to the exhibition of copies of "Mediaeval Frescoes from Yugoslavia," whose showing in Washington the Smithsonian Institution had been good enough to time so that it coincided with the Symposium.

The next two papers were devoted to the "minor" arts in the transalpine countries. Dr. Jean Porcher examined Byzantine elements in French book illumination. Concentrating on the twelfth century, he distinguished a first wave at the very beginning of the century, originating in Montecassino and affecting in the first instance the region of Toulouse; a second wave concentrated in Cluny and the North; and a third in the second half of the century, evident in manuscripts from the regions of Pontigny and Lyons.

Professor Demus, in the selfless role of a spokesman, presented a summary of a

discussion which had taken place a few weeks before at a working session held at Dumbarton Oaks on the art of Nicholas of Verdun. In this session, which was attended by Messrs. Hugo Buchthal, Otto Demus, Ernst Kitzinger, Jean Porcher, Willibald Sauerländer, Hanns Swarzenski, and Kurt Weitzmann, an attempt had been made not only to define Nicholas' relation to Byzantine art, but also to determine a number of other elements which affected his art in successive stages of its development, and to examine, in addition, the problem of his influence on Gothic cathedral sculpture.

There followed two papers devoted to panel painting, both of which are published in the present volume. Professor Weitzmann undertook a comprehensive survey of the rich treasures of icons of the Crusader period preserved on Mount Sinai. He identified several major groups; defined the Byzantine and non-Byzantine elements in these groups, and also discussed the possible role of the icons and their painters in carrying Byzantine influences to the West.

In a closely interlocking enquiry, Professor James Stubblebine undertook a re-exami-

nation of the scope and limits of the Byzantine influence in thirteenth-century Italian panel painting, particularly in the light of the material from Mount Sinai.

A paper by Professor Buchthal, also published in this volume, was devoted to a hitherto unidentified school of miniature painting which flourished in Sicily at the very end of the period under discussion, and whose particular character results from a fusion of Italian and local Sicilian elements with Byzantine ones originating partly in contemporary Palaeologan art and partly in earlier periods.

In the final lecture of the program the present writer focussed on certain recurrent problems which had figured in most, or all, of the papers presented, notably the means of transmission whereby Byzantine influences reached the West; the phases, or waves, of these influences; and their over-all meaning for the art of the West in the two centuries from Berzé-la-Ville to Duccio. Since the substance of this lecture is embodied in a paper published in the present volume, no further summing-up of the Symposium's conclusions is called for.